

No, Socrates:

How Plato Wants us to Read the Discussion of the Guardians' Nature and Nurture
in the *Republic*

Judge me, you gods: wrong I my enemies?

And if not so, how should I wrong a brother?

--William Shakespear, *Julius Caesar* 4.2.38-39

Why did Plato use so much ink having Socrates' interlocutors agree with almost everything that Socrates says? I argue that part of the explanation is that he wants us to do better than they do. He wants us to exercise the virtue of a judge and ask "Is that right?" (see *Apology* 18a3-6). When Socrates asks Euthyphro, "Ought we to inquire into the truth of this, or simply to accept the mere statement on our own authority and that of others?" (*Euthyphro* 9e4-6), the answer is that we obviously should inquire into the truth of what is said. In particular we shall see that Plato wants us to question the relationship between what he is currently saying and what he has said before.

In the first part of the article I consider the way in which Socrates develops the discussion of the proper nurture of the guardians. I argue that Plato is looking for a human response. We are supposed to keep the big picture in mind and remember what the conversation is trying to accomplish. After making an issue of not wanting to draw out the discussion to a tedious length, Socrates proceeds to present one lengthy digression after another. We shall see that he is actually teasing the reader, opening up the prospect of returning to the main issue and then failing to do so, over and over again. It is amusing to see how he plays cat and mouse with us.

In trying to determine how the guardians can avoid internecine conflict Socrates says something strange: "We deserve to be at a loss, my friend, for we have lost sight of

the comparison that we set before ourselves” (375d4-5). Even if the comparison between guardians and dogs were to make sense at this point in his argument, there is no reason why it being helpful earlier should mean that it would be helpful now. There is nothing deserving of punishment in losing sight of it. Losing sight of an earlier point that logically pertains to a current difficulty would be another matter. In particular we are supposed to see that Adeimantus deserves to be at a loss as he forgets what the argument is trying to accomplish. I shall argue that our pages of the *Republic* are concerned with keeping in mind points made earlier in the argument—with thinking dialectically—and are thus about truly not deserving to be at a loss.

In the second part of the article I consider the discussion of the nature required of the guardians. I will use the discussion of how a certain nature is required of the guardians in order for them to avoid internecine conflict in order to illustrate the playful use of the written word of *Phaedrus* 275-276. At *Phaedrus* 276a Plato distinguishes between the living word written with intelligence in the soul of the learner and its brother, the written word, which is a kind of image of the living word. The living word can defend itself, but the written word, because of its inability to defend itself, always needs its parent to come to its aid. This distinction corresponds to *Meno* 85c10-d1, where Socrates says of Meno’s slave: “But if he were asked many times in many ways, you know in the end he will have as exact an understanding as anyone.” The slave might be able to repeat a proof, but he will not truly see the underlying relationship of ideas until he has approached the problem in many ways. When he finally sees it, he will have the living word written with intelligence in his soul. In the *Republic* Socrates could simply have said that in order for a gang of thieves to avoid internecine conflict they must at

least have Polemarchus' morality of helping one's friends and harming one's enemies. Instead he says that they must have some justice in them, and leaves it to the critically engaged reader to see that Polemarchus' previously dismissed morality would also do the job. And then he asks the same question in a different way when he argues that guardians must have a natural love of philosophy in order to avoid internecine strife. It is only when we are able to see how the earlier arguments relate to the current argument that it can be said of us that we have appropriated the living word.

Thus the first part of the article is about how *not* to read Plato; we should not allow ourselves to lose sight of the previous stages of the argument and be deserving of being at a loss. And the second half is about how to read Plato; we should see how the thoughts presented in previous arguments are related to the current argument, and thus be the opposite of deserving to be at a loss.

I. Plato Plays Cat to the Reader's Mouse

In this first part of the article I show that Plato is not serious as he presents his argument for what the guardians' education must be like. Socrates makes an issue of avoiding unnecessary digressions, and then proceeds to get caught up in unnecessary digression after unnecessary digression, forgetting the task of determining the causes of justice and injustice that is supposed to be driving the discussion. He actually teases the reader, getting the reader to hope that the discussion of the guardians' education is about to come to an end, only to dash those hopes with yet another educational concern. We are thus encouraged to bear in mind what the dialogue is supposed to be proving.

Just before Socrates begins the discussion of the nature and nurture of the guardians we find the following exchange between Socrates and Glaucon:

“So it is our business to define, if we can, the natural gifts that fit men to be guardians of a commonwealth, and to select them accordingly. It will certainly be a formidable task; but we must not shrink from doing what we are able.”

“Yes” (374e6-375a1)

Why does Glaucon say “yes”? They are trying to discern “the origin of justice and injustice in states” (372e4-6). They have established a principle that people should do the work that comes naturally to them, and they have just come to the conclusion that they will need an army made up of specialists whose natural work is that of soldiering. Why should recognizing which people are natural soldiers be of more importance than recognizing which people are natural farmers or natural builders? Why should they be concerned with recognizing natural aptitudes at all? Why *must* they not shrink from what seems like a mere detail of administration? It seems quite arbitrary. Socrates might have a good reason, but, because he does not share it, Glaucon assents too readily.

After arguing that the guardians must possess certain natural traits Socrates then asks:

Given these natural qualities, then, how are they to be brought up and educated? First, will the answer to that question help the purpose of our whole inquiry, which is to make out how justice and injustice originate in a state? We want to be thorough, but not to draw out the

discussion to a tedious length.¹ (376c7-d3)

Adeimantus replies: “I certainly think it will help.” But surely Adeimantus has no more clue as to how the proper nurture of the guardians could be helpful in determining the origin of justice and injustice than has any first-time reader of the *Republic*. Surely every first-time reader feels that there is something lacking in Adeimantus’ response. He does not really seem to be coming from anywhere; he is merely allowing Socrates to lead. It is nice, though, that Socrates has made an issue of whether or not they should pursue this line of inquiry. At least he is doing better than when he simply said that they *must* not shrink from defining the natural gifts of the guardians. Plato must have wanted us to notice the difference.

After a lengthy development, which seems merely to bring forward a number of very loosely related considerations, Socrates concludes,

“We have determined the right way of speaking about gods and daemons and heroes and the world below” (392a3-6).

Well, that is a relief. Now it seems we can get on with a direct consideration of the origin of justice and injustice. But, no, Socrates then adds,

“There remains the literature concerned with human life” (392a8).

This seems to promise another lengthy development. But then we again seem to be offered relief as he continues by saying, “We cannot lay down rules for that at our present stage” (392a10-11).

This claim is inconsistent with what has gone before; they have been guided by an understanding of human goodness all along.² For example, Socrates determined the content of some of the stories about the gods by using the principle that a good person

possesses within himself all that is necessary for a good life and is least dependent upon others (387d11-e1). Immortals should be depicted that way, because mortals will have a tendency to emulate them (e.g., 387e9-388a3). If he could use that claim as a basis of determining the content of some of the stories about the gods, then he could now use it to determine the content of at least some stories about human life. But, even though Socrates' claim deserves to be questioned, it would be more politic of Adeimantus not to do so and to allow the conversation to return to the question of how justice and injustice arise.

The specific problems that supposedly prevent them from laying down the rules for stories about human life do not involve consideration of the values that should be emulated by the guardians. They involve new considerations of plot, for example whether just men are to be represented as happy or wretched (392a13-b6). Whether or not just men are happy is the underlying issue that originally prompted Socrates to try to determine the causes of justice and injustice in a state (368b-369a). Thus Socrates is saying that his present method of solving the original problem will not be completed until the original problem is solved in some other way.

Even if one misses the fact that Socrates is saying that his method of resolving the issue cannot possibly succeed, it is still possible to see that Socrates catches Adeimantus thinking undialectically:

I presume we are going to say that both poets and writers of prose speak wrongly about men in matters of greatest moment, saying that there are many examples of men who, though unjust, are happy, and of just men who are wretched, and that there is profit in injustice if it be concealed,

and that justice is the other man's good and your own loss; and I presume that we shall forbid them to say this sort of thing and command them to sing and fable the opposite. Don't you think so? (392a13-b6)

Thrasymachus made all the claims that they would be assuming to be false (343b1-c8), and Socrates is discussing the just state in order to answer Glaucon's and Adeimantus' effort to support Thrasymachus' position (358b2-4). Now, either Socrates has lost sight of what he is supposed to be doing as he merely presumes that Thrasymachus is wrong, or he is testing Adeimantus to see if he has lost sight of their basic task. Because Socrates will shortly make plain that he has not forgotten, it follows that he is testing Adeimantus. Adeimantus seems quite the Polonius as he initially responds to Socrates' question "Don't you think so?" by saying "I do not think it, I know it well" (392b7). But, after Socrates observes that they would be conceding the original question of the dialogue if they were to make these presumptions, Adeimantus simply says "Rightly apprehended" (392b10). There is no indication that he is aware that he has called into question what he has just claimed to know so well. He merely seems ready to agree to anything that Socrates might say.

After this explanation of why they are supposedly not yet in a position to determine the content of literature concerned with human life, Socrates seems to offer the hope of escaping into a more germane topic of conversation: "So much for the content of literature" (392c6). (They have dealt with stories about immortals and have put off until later the stories about humans, thus Socrates seem to consider stories about animals to be unimportant.) The cat thus gives the mouse the appearance of an opportunity to escape: we are being presented with the prospect of returning to the original subject of discussion

to which Socrates has just referred, and of which Adeimantus had completely lost sight. But then down comes the cat's paw: "If we consider next the question of form, we shall then have covered the whole field, what is to be said and how" (392c6-8). Rather than questioning whether or not this might be drawing out to "a tedious length" what already seems to be too long of a digression, Adeimantus merely asks to have the term 'form' clarified. Surely the first-time reader of the *Republic* also has no idea of what Socrates might be thinking ... and yet still does not want Socrates to pursue this new question. While the content of the stories children hear has an influence upon their character, must we really be concerned with the way in which the stories are delivered? Would it not be better to return to the original problem of determining how justice and injustice come about in cities? It seems very probable that this will "draw out this discussion to a tedious length" (376d2-3).

The game of cat and mouse continues after Socrates completes the lengthy discussion of the proper form for the stories: "So now, my friend, we have set forth both the content and the form of literature, and we have completely finished with that part of education" (398b6-8). Form and content—what else could there be? Socrates has already described them as constituting the whole field (392c6-8), and now he actually says that he is *completely* finished with them. But there is a foreshadowing of further tedious digression in the words "that part of education." Are we really going to have to consider some other part of education? (They began the discussion with the traditional organization of education into that which cultivates the soul and that which cultivates the body [376e3-4]. There is thus the threat that we might also have to be concerned with the guardians' physical education.) Still, when Adeimantus agrees that they have completely

finished with that part of education, there is a feeling that we are about to get back on track.

And then down comes the paw. Socrates' next words are, "There remains the question of song and melody" (398c1-2). There *is* something in addition to form and content of literature, at least when the stories are set to music; form and content do not really constitute the whole field (as Socrates claimed back at 392c6-8). But still the cat proceeds to give the mouse some grounds for hope: "Now anyone could discover the rules we must make as to the character of songs and melody in order to conform to what has already been said" (398c4-6). Thus at least this discussion does not seem as if it will be very lengthy. If it is merely a question of conformity to what they have already said, no new considerations will need to be brought forward. But then what is the point of having the discussion at all, if it is to be derived easily from what has been said before? If what is to be added contains nothing really new, then it would not help with our effort to understand how justice and injustice originate in a society, and should be rejected as an unnecessary digression. Socrates seems to have forgotten his task and to have taken on a concern for the details of how the state should be administered merely for the sake of determining how the state should be administered.

At this point Glaucon interrupts the conversation between Socrates and Adeimantus, and says with a laugh, "I am afraid 'anyone' does not include me, Socrates" (398c7-8). That is, Glaucon does not see how rules about music follow from what has been said earlier. Could he not have just kept quiet? Why does he have to be so honest? I do not see how they follow either, but I do not care. I merely want to get back to the issue of the origin of justice and injustice in states.³

And then, Socrates says: “Songs consist of three elements: words, tune, and rhythm” (398d1-2). Are we really going to have to take a course in musicology? The cat’s paw really stings this time.

But it is quickly lifted: “So far as the words go, it will make no difference whether they are set to music or not; in either case they must conform to the rules that we have already made for the content and form of literature ... And the tune and rhythm should fit the words” (398d4-9). It seems as if we really are going to stay within the bounds of the preceding discussion after all.

But, even though it would all follow from what they have said before, they proceed to discuss the implications for tune and rhythm of some of the specific points they raised about words. Numerous additional considerations are also discussed, including the influence upon the young guardians of their furniture and architecture. Still, we do eventually seem to have reached the end:

“Then is not our account of education in the arts now complete?

It has ended where it ought to end, in the love of beauty.” (403c4-7)

Finally the discussion seems to be at an end. If education in the arts is now complete, we will not have to worry about what might exist in stories besides content, form, song, and melody.

But, nevertheless, there is still a threat, for they have finished merely with education in *the arts*; the arts were for the education of the soul, so there still remains the question of physical education of the body. It has been poised over our heads since 398b6-8. Sure enough, Socrates continues by saying, “Next the upbringing of our young

men must include gymnastics; and this too must be no less carefully regulated throughout life from childhood up” (403c9-d1).

The paw now lifts in a way similar to the way it lifted with respect to music at 398d4-9, where Socrates indicated that the proper music could be derived from what had been said before: he now says that a sound soul would have the power in itself to make the bodily condition as perfect as it can be, and therefore we should do well “to train the soul sufficiently and leave the cultivation of the body in detail to it” (403d2-8). But, even if it were true that a sound soul would have this power, that would not be enough to resolve the current issue, for they are trying to determine the guardians’ physical education “from childhood up.” It would take individual children a long time to make their souls good enough to take care of their bodies. But, again, I do not care if Socrates does not see this objection, for it sounds as if we have finally escaped the cat; now that the cultivation of the soul has been taken care of and there is no need to be concerned with the details of the cultivation of the body, what other reason could there be for not returning to the issue of how justice and injustice originate in state?

But, rather than returning, Socrates merely says, “We shall avoid making a long story of it by giving only a rough outline” (403d8-e2). He said we merely need not go into the *details* of how cultivated minds would conduct physical education, but, even though a sound mind would supposedly have the power in itself to make the bodily condition as perfect as it can be, he is still going to tell us about physical education *in rough outline*. He does not give any reason why the rough outline should be helpful to their quest even though the details would not be. It is too bad that Glaucon is not more intelligent; if he were, he might remember that he needs to consider whether or not they

were drawing out the discussion to a tedious length (see 376d2-3). It rather seems as if he is fooled by Socrates' claim that, by considering a rough outline, they will avoid making a long story of it, as he replies to Socrates' proposal by saying, "By all means" (403e3).

After yet another lengthy development, Socrates seems to call a halt to all these digressions: "So much for the rough outlines of education and upbringing" (412b2-3). He thus seems to have accomplished the explicit task of 376c7-8. Prior to that they had taken care of the guardians' nature. Now he has considered their proper nurture. What else could he have us think about besides nature and nurture? But a rub still lies in the words, 'the rough outline'. While at 403d2-e2, Socrates forsook details of physical education in favor of merely giving a rough outline, there is no guarantee that he will do the opposite for more general education and upbringing. I am braced for the cat's paw this time: now that he has completed the rough outlines of education and upbringing, it seems likely that he will proceed with the details of the education and upbringing of souls (for he has given us reasons only for ignoring the details of physical education).

He explains why he thinks he has completed the rough outline of education and upbringing by asking, "Why should one recite the list of dances of such citizens, their hunts and chases with hounds, their athletic contests and horse races" (412b3-4). That is, he feels that he has completed the broad outline for the specific reason that only such details remain to be considered. It seems as if Socrates is finally being reasonable: he is right to question the need to continue any further. The lists of entertainment items do indeed seem to be too insignificant to help in his effort to understand the origination of justice and injustice in a state; delineating them would indeed draw out their discussion to

a tedious length. But Socrates has a different reason for not considering them. Rather than dismissing these details as being irrelevant, he dismisses them by saying, “It is fairly plain that they must conform to our principles and can easily be worked out” (412b4-6). Consideration of the ease of working out the proper tunes and rhythms from what had previously been said did not stop Socrates at 398d. Why should it stop him now? Moreover, it is by no means fairly plain that, for example, what types of horse races they should have can be deduced from what they have previously said. Should there be a five-kilometer race in addition to a ten-kilometer race, or are both of these distances too long? The idea that the answer to such questions could be derived from what they have said before is obviously preposterous.

Back at 398c7-8 Glaucon confessed that he did not see how the way in which stories should be set to music followed from their previous principles. The dramatic issue in our present passage is whether or not he will similarly say that he does not see how such details as the listing of their horse races can be derived from what has been said before. But he does not repeat that earlier move. He merely says that there might not be any difficulty in working out such lists (412b7). His uncertainty implies that he does not see it—which, of course, he could not possibly—but he is willing to accept the lack of difficulty on Socrates’ authority. Or, perhaps, he has wised up and is not such a sap as to encourage Socrates to list details of entertainment, because he does not want to waste time pursuing irrelevant topics. In the latter case, if he were really honest, he would say that he thinks that pursuing such matters is not worth their time, instead of pretending to have some degree of insight about the derivation of the details of entertainment. Even though it is by no means clear how the details follow from what has been said, it is a sure

bet that there never has been a reader of the *Republic* who wanted to hear about them. It seems obvious that Plato wants the reader to feel the need to be in continuity with the original basis of the argument.

II. Plato offers the Opportunity of Seeing How the Present Argument Relates to Previous Arguments

The beginning of Socrates' discussion of the guardian's nature seems *prima facie* to be ludicrous. Socrates asks if there is any difference between the young guardian's nature and the nature of a young well-bred dog (375a2-3). One would think that there would be a good many differences between a natural soldier and a good dog. If nothing else, a good soldier will sometimes use his brains in a way that a dog could not. Glaucon does well to ask what point Socrates has in mind (375a4). Socrates explains that "both must be keen of perception, lightly nimble in pursuit of the people that they have perceived, and also strong to fight when they have caught up with them" (375a5-7).

But one does not need to be keen of perception to be a good soldier. General Kutuzov was a good soldier even though he had terrible peripheral vision. It is true that he would not be a very good sentry, but, fortunately, not every soldier has to perform every job in an army. If a nearsighted soldier is lightly nimble and strong, he can apprehend and fight the enemy after his partner with keen senses has pointed them out to him.

Similarly one does not have to be a lightly nimble runner to be a good soldier. A slow sentry with quick senses can merely point out the espied enemy to the lightly nimble

runners and the lightly nimble runners can then catch up with them. If the sentry's stronger companions are not as fast as his more lightly nimble companions, perhaps the lightly nimble ones can hold up the enemy long enough to give the stronger ones time to arrive.

Strength, on the other hand, really does seem to be a generally required quality. That is one of the reasons why soldiers must perform pushups in basic training. But Plato is aware that strength is not dependent upon nature, for later in the *Republic* he will tell us that athletes engage in the rigors of physical training for the sake of increasing their muscular strength (410b5-8). To be sure, nature is related to strength: they have weight classes in weightlifting competitions. Lightweight who do many pushups will not be as strong as heavyweights who work equally as hard. But surely Plato is not saying that, in order to fight the enemy, once the enemy has been caught, the guardians must all be heavyweights. The welterweight champion weightlifter would surely also be a sufficiently strong fighter. Thus Socrates has yet to name a single necessary condition for the guardians' *nature*.

Light nimbleness tends to be a trait of smaller people—there are not many heavyweight sprinters—and smaller people tend to be less strong than larger people. If strength really were dependent upon nature, it might be very difficult to have enough lightly nimble, strong people to fill the ranks of an army.

Socrates next claims that courage is necessary for the guardians (375a9), and this does indeed seem to be true. But he then asks if a living thing can will to be courageous without being high-spirited, whether that thing be a horse or a dog or anything else (375a11-12). This seems highly questionable for non-human mammals: timid mothers

can fight courageously when their young are attacked, for example. And it seems patently false for human beings: timid people can fight courageously, for example when they are knowingly engaged in a life-or-death struggle, or when they are protecting their families. As Socrates observes at 467a10-b1: “When it comes to fighting, every creature will do better in the presence of its offspring.”

Socrates defends his false claim about the necessity of being high-spirited by saying, “every high-spirited soul is fearless and indomitable in the face of any danger” (375a12-b2). But, of course, he cannot prove that a trait is *necessary* for courage, by showing that it is *sufficient* for courage. Let us give Plato the benefit of a doubt and presuppose that he made this elementary logical mistake on purpose. The alternative to giving him the benefit of a doubt is to think that he has difficulty with the distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions, and if this were the case then we should look for a more intelligent philosopher to study. But, because Plato is obviously very intelligent, it seems a reasonable doubt: he seems not to be serious in his argument that high-spiritedness is necessary for courage.

Note also that the falsity of the claim that spiritedness is a sufficient condition for being fearless and indomitable in the face of *any* danger. While a high-spirited person might be fearless and indomitable in the face of a rabid tiger, we would not want to pronounce people to be lacking in high-spiritedness merely because they choose not to try to deal with a dozen rabid tigers. There is, after all, a distinction between being courageous and being rash (At *Laches* 197b2-4 Nicias says: "In my opinion very few people are endowed with courage and forethought, while rashness, boldness, and

fearlessness, with no forethought to guide it, are found in a great number of men, women, children, and animals.")

Socrates then proceeds to ask, "How are men of that natural disposition to be kept from behaving harshly to one another and to the rest of their countrymen?" (375b9-10). He claims that it seems impossible to have good guardians, because it seems impossible to keep such spirited soldiers from engaging in internecine fighting (375c1-d1).⁴ The idea that it is impossible to have good guardians is ridiculously false, for, of course, there have been good groups of soldiers in this world. What, then, is it that prevents a group of ready-to-fight men from turning on each other? For example, how do Hell's Angels sometimes manage to avoid internecine conflict?

In Book One Socrates argued that, in order for a group of people, such as a gang of robbers, to work together to effect any strong action, they must have enough justice in them to refrain from injuring each other (351c7-352d2). The first premise of his argument is that such a gang would not be likely to succeed if they treated each other unjustly (351c7-10), for factions, hatreds and internecine conflict come from injustice, but justice brings oneness of mind and friendship (351d4-6). People will not be likely to attain to their mutual goal, if they are not of one mind; instead of working toward their mutual goal, they would be working toward their individual goals. Accordingly the members of Hell's Angels would need to have some justice in them in order to stay focussed on their mutual goal and avoid internecine conflict.⁵

But let us stop and think about *that* for a while. Let us perform with the virtue of a judge and ask "Is that right?" (see *Apology* 18a3-6). While justice brings oneness of mind, perhaps something else could do so as well. Socrates' next formulation about the

dog-like guardians is helpful: “And yet we must have them gentle to their friends and harsh to their enemies; otherwise they will destroy themselves without waiting till others destroy them” (375c1-4). What, other than justice, could cause people to be gentle to their friends and harsh to their enemies? Socrates’ formulation seems purposely designed to echo Polemarchus’ position at 332a9-b8, where he proposed that justice is a matter of helping one’s friends and harming one’s enemies. Socrates disagreed with Polemarchus, holding, “it is no more the function of goodness to harm than heat to cool or dryness to produce moisture” (335d3-8). The Hell’s Angels do not need to partake of Socrates’ justice in order to avoid fighting amongst themselves like the Three Stooges; all that is required is that they partake of Polemarchus’ team-player attitude of trying to help their friends and harm their enemies. If the Three Stooges had more common sense, they would realize that what they can attain through cooperation is more valuable than what they can attain through internecine conflict and they could therefore adopt Polemarchus’ attitude and refrain from fighting amongst themselves. Both Socrates’ justice (never harming anyone) and Polemarchus’ team-player morality involve not harming one’s friends, and thus either would be sufficient to prevent internecine conflict. The guardians do not have to be just; all that is required is that they see working together as a team to be in their individual self-interests.⁶ Such common sense can be instilled by proper nurture. Perhaps the Three Stooges—or perhaps insane people—would not have natures amenable to such instruction, but that hardly implies that natural guardians *must* be naturally gentle toward their friends, which is the conclusion toward which Socrates is headed.

Before Socrates comes to that conclusion he says something strange: “We deserve to be at a loss, my friend, for we have lost sight of the comparison that we set before

ourselves” (375d4-5). A clever listener might realize that because dogs and horses and everything else have been described as being courageous if high spirited (375a11-12), and because spirited dogs and horses and lots of other things do manage to avoid internecine conflict, it might be useful to consider how dogs and horses and lots of other things manage to do so. But there is no reason to give priority to dogs. There is nothing deserving of punishment in losing sight of the comparison with dogs. Losing sight of an earlier point that logically pertains to a current difficulty would be another matter. I have been arguing that the *Republic* is concerned with keeping such earlier points in mind—and is thus about truly not deserving to be at a loss.

Socrates continues the joke of the good guardians being like good dogs by saying, “There are natures in which the opposed qualities of gentleness and great-spiritedness are combined” (375d7-8). He claims that dogs are by instinct most gentle toward people whom they know and to whom they are accustomed and that they are the opposite way to strangers (375e1-4).⁷ Now, to quote *Euthyphro* 9e4-6, “Ought we to inquire into the truth of this, or simply to accept the mere statement on our own authority and that of others?” Is it really the case that good dogs are most gentle toward people they know and to whom they are accustomed?

Socrates seems to be purposely showing this claim to be false when he says, “It is really remarkable how the creature gets angry at the mere sight of a stranger and fawns upon anyone he knows, though he may never have been treated unkindly by the one or kindly by the other” (376a2-8). Even though the dog has never been treated unkindly by the stranger, it will still become angry at the mere sight of him. Of course, if he had previously been treated unkindly by this person, it would be perfectly understandable for

him to become angry at the mere sight of the person. Therefore it is clear that dogs can sometimes become angry with people whom they know. Therefore the claim that well-bred dogs are most gentle with people they know and to whom they are accustomed (375e1-4) is false. Is it not strange that Socrates should provide us with a counterexample to his own generalization? It almost seems as if he wanted us to see why his generalization is false.

This attitude of welcoming people whom the dog recognizes (and, we must now add, who have not treated the dog unkindly) and of becoming angry at the mere sight of strangers does seem to come naturally to dogs (376a11-b1). They do not need to be trained to bark at the mailman. But it seems utterly absurd when Socrates calls this instinct “philosophic in the true sense” (376b1).⁸ How can dogs be philosophic? They do not even know how to get to the library.

Because supposedly the only mark by which a dog distinguishes the ones who are dear to it from the ones who are hated by it is that it knows the one and does not know the other, the dog is said to have a love of learning (376b8-9). But is it really true that one necessarily has a love for the criteria by which one determines whether one likes someone? Would red necessarily be a favorite color of the British troops in the Revolutionary War? No, it would not be at all surprising if one of the artists among them did not have red on his palette. An endangered British soldier would have a passion principally for ascertaining who is on his side, rather than a passion for the color that shows him that someone is on his side. Similarly the dog would care for knowledge as a means to ascertaining who is on his side. This can be seen plainly enough when the dog recognizes someone who has mistreated it. Even though it knows the person, it still

becomes angry with him. Dogs have a natural passion for the end for which they employ their knowledge: they have a natural passion for friends and against enemies.

Polemarchus' morality of helping one's friends and harming one's enemies comes naturally to them. Thus, when my dog jumps up and down when I come home, it is not excited because it knows me and loves to know things. Its joy at the approach of a friend would be joy at the prospect of being with the friend, not joy at experiencing something that it knows.⁹

Plato, no doubt, wishes us to see that his next move is invalid also—he claims the dog's supposed passion for knowledge is the same as philosophy. Philosophers do not have a passion for all kinds of knowledge. (The fact that Plato makes this false claim at 475c does not, in itself, imply that he is serious here.) A philosopher would not necessarily be interested in ancient Greek musicology, or in how they organized their horse races, unless it happened to bear upon a genuinely philosophical issue.

Socrates then repeats part of his question of 375e9-11: “Shall we boldly say, then, that the same is true of human beings? If a man is to be gentle towards his own people, whom he knows, he must have an instinctive love of wisdom and learning?” (376b11-c2). As we have seen, this is as mistaken as it sounds. A gang of robbers can do better than the Three Stooges and work together cooperatively, even though none of them enjoyed themselves when they went to school—let alone doing so out of instinct. All that is required is that they have the Polemarchean attitude of helping their friends and harming their enemies, and for human beings this is something that would come from nurture rather than from nature.

The words “shall we boldly say” sound good, but bold argumentation is far inferior to careful argumentation. In agreeing with Socrates Glaucon is here deciding to forsake critical thinking and is thus failing in his role as the one who answers Socrates’ questions. Indeed, his lack of critical involvement has allowed Socrates to put forth a great deal of nonsense.

III. Conclusion

In Part I we saw that Socrates was teasing us, making us wish that he would stop presenting unnecessary digressions about the nurture of the guardians and continue on with his original project. The original project was generally not held in view. In Part II we saw that the argument that the guardians must have a certain nature was complete nonsense. In particular, when we articulated what was wrong with the argument that they must have that nature, we saw that one of the required natural traits (being able to avoid internecine fighting) was not really natural but could be instilled through an upbringing that conveys Polemarchus’ morality.

Surely Plato is a very bright person; therefore he must be having Socrates make these mistakes on purpose. In particular, the fact that Plato provides us with a counterexample to his own premise (the fact that dogs do not like those people they know and who have mistreated them shows that dogs do not necessarily like the people they know) can hardly be a mere coincidence. Nor could it be a mere coincidence that, earlier in the dialogue he presented ideas that make invalid the argument that the guardians must have a natural love of philosophy (the guardians could try to benefit their friends and harm their enemies either merely because they have had justice in them or merely

because they have Polemarchus' morality inculcated in them). Because Plato seems to be having Socrates make these mistakes on purpose, there ought to be some meaning being made behind all the bad argumentation.

The importance of thinking dialectically is especially emphasized by the way in which Socrates ends the discussion of the proper content of the stories that are to be told to the young guardians. After laying down the rules for the stories about gods, demigods, heroes, and the world below, Socrates claims that he cannot lay down rules for stories about human life because he would then have to presume that the views he is arguing against are false. Before it was pointed out to Adeimantus that these views are the very points at issue, Adeimantus is asinine in his confidence that he knows them to be true. The point is in the humor: you should remember what we are supposed to be doing, Adeimantus. You should think dialectically.

True philosophy requires not losing the thread. While Socrates was mistaken when he claimed, "we deserve to be at a loss, my friend, for we have lost sight of the comparison that we set before ourselves" (375d4-5), those who lose the thread of an argument do deserve to be at a loss. Platonic scholarship therefore generally deserves to be at a loss, for it tends to deal with the results of Plato's various arguments apart from consideration of the details of the arguments from which they are derived. Once one realizes that Plato is making mistakes on purpose, one cannot treat those results so simplistically. Issues such as the nature required of a guardian lose their importance, and the ideas that show Socrates' arguments to be unsound gain importance. In the sections of the *Republic* with which we have been dealing, Plato seems rather to be concerned with trying to write upon the reader's soul the importance of thinking

dialectically and also to write upon the reader's soul the idea that either justice or Polemarchus' morality of helping friends and harming enemies can allow members of a group to be of one mind and work toward their common goal.

The successful writer of such playful written words will be pleased "when he writes for others following the same path and sees them putting forth tender shoots" (*Phaedrus* 276d4-5). Plato mixes his metaphor here, but the continuity is between the branching path that has been followed thus far and the shoots that branch off in new directions; we are to follow a path in which each piece of new growth constitutes a further branch along the trail. Once we have one living word within us (for example once we get to the point of being able to see that either Socrates' justice, or Polemarchus' team-player morality can prevent internecine conflict amongst a gang of robbers or amongst the guardians), Plato can build on this and lead us to further living words.

Notes

¹Annas is not true to the text when she says that Socrates is here apologizing for the lengthy nature of his development (p. 80). Socrates is merely saying that they should abstain from making the development overly long by talking about irrelevant considerations. For example, if I say that I do not want to make my indictment of President Bush overly long by talking about irrelevant matters, I am not apologizing for the considerable length of my indictment.

²Strauss (*The City and Man*, p. 100), (followed by Nichols [pp. 77-78]) notes this.

³Rosen claims that Glaucon laughs “out of restlessness at the prospect of listening to more austere talk about music” (p. 106). But Glaucon is interjecting himself into the dialogue between Adeimantus and Socrates in order to encourage Socrates to talk more about music. Glaucon wants to know how the rules about music follow; to the extent that his is interested, he would not be restless at the prospect.

⁴Hobbes is not in accord with this passage when she claims, “*Andreia* [courage] is not represented as wild risk taking or a lust for killing” (p. 12).

⁵Bloom (p. 336), Dorter (p. 39), Strauss (*History of Political Philosophy*, p. 40), Stauffer (p. 109), and Irwin (*Plato’s Moral Theory*, p. 143; *Plato’s Ethics*, p. 178) find Socrates’ argument to be convincing.

Reeve holds that if the members of the group *believe* they have been treated justly, then that would be sufficient for them to work together for their common goal (p. 21). If an instrumental goal of an unjust member of the group is the same as the group's goal, then, if the unjust member is deceptive enough, he can treat the other members of the group unjustly, and they will still cooperate with him to attain to that goal. It is the sort of thing that Lyndon Johnson did to Hubert Humphrey (Caro, p. 456). But, then, this would still seem to entail that the cooperating members have some justice in them. It seems impossible for *all* the members of a group to be treating each other unjustly, all to be deceiving each other about it, and for them all still to work together toward the same common goal.

Cross and Woosley (p. 56, followed by Hobbs [p. 173]) claim that a gang can be held together by mutual fear, or fear of the boss, or the continued success of their endeavor (p. 56). Mutual fear (e.g., in *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*) or fear of the boss (e.g., in a Roman galley) could indeed be enough to keep people from pursuing their own private goals. There would be no conflict between my instrumental goal and the goal of the group, because the goal of the group would become my instrumental good as I try to avoid being harmed. Similarly, if the goal of the group is of vital importance to the members of the group (e.g., we can't let the enemy platoon get around our flank), the continued success of our endeavor can be the goal of each individual member.

Plato himself indicates another way in which the group can be of one mind when he has Thrasymachus respond to Socrates' claim by saying, "Not to differ with you" (353d7). Thrasymachus does not want to differ with Socrates—he wants to be of one mind with Socrates—ostensibly because he wants to please or appease Socrates (350e6).

It is not justice which ostensibly motivates Thrasymachus, but a desire to stay on good terms with Socrates.

⁶Strauss (followed by Rosen [p. 58]) is mistaken in thinking that Socrates is reestablishing Polemarchus' definition of justice when he claims that justice is required for the members of a gang to be of one mind at 351c7-352d2 (*The City and Man*, p. 82). While it is true that Polemarchus' morality also solves this particular problem, that does not affect the fact that Socrates has explicitly disagreed with Polemarchus' definition of justice (335d3-8).

⁷The fact that Socrates says that this is "by instinct" shows that Annas is incorrect when she claims that he is talking about a *trained* dog (p. 81). Both Annas and Newell (p. 110) seemed confused by the ambiguity of the English expression "well-bred". There can be no doubt that *gennaios*, the word translated by this expression, refers to being well-bred in the sense of having a good pedigree.

⁸Schofield, evidently sensing the absurdity of Socrates' claim, tries to make it acceptable by saying "embryonically philosophical, we might want to say" (p. 40). But Socrates is ready for such an attempt to dilute his meaning, for he says, "philosophic in the true sense." Sanday makes a similar mistake (pp. 313-4).

⁹Guthrie (p. 450), Howland (p. 95), Cornford (p. 65), Long (p. 80), Bloom (p. 350), Ranasinghe (p. 13), and Bosanquet (p. 86) all see that Plato is joking, but they do not consider why Plato would want to offer up such a joke.

White mistakes a sufficient condition for a necessary condition when he thinks that it is implied that all lovers of wisdom love those whom they know (p. 91). Newell makes a similar mistake (p. 114).

Reeve seems divorced from the text when he writes, “I doubt that any more is intended here than the natural idea that if guardians are to be harsh to enemies and gentle to friends, it must be possible to train them to distinguish the one from the other in a reliable fashion” (p. 179) (Blackburn makes the same mistake [p. 52]). At this point in the text it is a question of the guardian’s *nature*, not of their training. Moreover, the Three Stooges have no problem identifying their friends. Their problem, like that of many a married couple, is that they cannot help fighting with the people who are on their side.

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